



## Counseling an Addict's Enabler

Mark E. Shaw, D.Min., ACBC, CABC

Director of Counseling, Grace Fellowship Church

Author of *Divine Intervention: Hope and Help for Families of Addicts*

Founder of *The Addiction Connection*

---

### INTRODUCTION

#### Objectives

1. What is enabling and what are some of the heart issues behind it?
2. Learn some practical counseling tools and questions to ask enablers.
3. Examine the ways that enablers contribute to an addict's sin and scriptural examples and truths to help you confront and correct enabling family members of those who struggle with addiction.

**Ephesians 5:11-17** *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, <sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." <sup>15</sup> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (ESV)<sup>1</sup>*

#### **I. What is "Enabling?" Objective: Contrast the therapeutic, secular definition with a biblical understanding of an enabler.**

- A. **Positive** connotation → to help someone, to empower, to make able, support  
Example: "She gave me a loan to enable me to start my own business."

**James 2:15-17** *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

**Proverbs 19:17** *Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.*

**1 John 3:16-18** *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the*

---

<sup>1</sup> All scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®) copyright © 2001. By Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



---

*brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

- B. Negative connotation (especially in the addiction counseling world) → to prohibit or shield someone from experiencing the full impact of the consequences of their behavior.
1. Could result in the person failing to grow and change.
  2. Might lead to further irresponsibility, possibly a victim mentality.  
Example: A dad gives his daughter fifty dollars for “groceries” even though he suspects she will use the money to buy meth.
  3. Our biblical counseling goal: to help the enabling family member have wise, God-pleasing interactions with their loved one that don’t enable sin.
- C. The Biblical counselor must help family members to discern their own heart motives for their actions and lead them to repentance when necessary (**Eph. 5:11**).
1. Are they encouraging the addict to be irresponsible?
  2. Are they protecting the addict from consequences? (bailing him out of jail really fast). May be enabling in a bad sense (not always).
    - a. Not analyzing the behavior but the heart behind it.
    - b. Figure out the “why” for enabling...
      - i. Is the enabler feeling guilty for some reason? (Examples: perceived parenting flaws or failures)
      - ii. Is the enabler feeling fearful or anxious? (fearful of loved one’s death, trying to control outcome)
      - iii. Is the enabler ignorant about what true help really is?
      - iv. Is the enabler acting in the best interest of self? (Idolatry?)
      - v. Can the enabler begin to do things for God’s glory? (Heart question with the right motivation)
      - vi. Can the enabler see that he is leaning upon his own understanding? (Heart question)

## II. Teach Couselees the Principle of Accountability to God

- A. Each person is accountable for his/her own words and actions:
- Romans 14:12** *So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.*
- Matthew 25:27-29** *Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.*
- Hebrews 4:13** *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*



---

**Matthew 12:36-37** *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, <sup>37</sup> for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*

**James 4:17** *So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

- B. Goal is teaching these scriptures (above) to help your counselees discern and separate the addict's responsibility to God from their own as a family member.

### III. How to Confront and Correct an Enabler

- A. No one's role is to be the "Holy Spirit"
  - 1. Idle, unruly, or self-willed person
  - 2. The enabler cannot rescue them by doing the work for them in an attempt to "control" the situation.
- B. **1 Timothy 5:13-15** *Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. <sup>14</sup> So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. <sup>15</sup> For some have already strayed after Satan. <sup>16</sup> If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.*
- C. **2 Thessalonians 3:6-12** *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. <sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. <sup>9</sup> It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. <sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.*
- D. More Biblical Term: Characteristics of a **Busybody**:
  - 1. More involved in other people, more intent upon the matters of others; fascinated, not disgusted, by the sins of others
  - 2. Little focus on self; their identity is found in others and a false security:
    - a. "I am helping them."
    - b. "Nothing is wrong in my heart."
    - c. "The person who needs to change is my addicted loved one."
    - d. Not intent on own life, but meddling **1 Peter 4:15** *But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.*
    - e. Often fueled by pride, a busybody uses his/her time to "help" someone else thinking he/she knows better than they do



- f. Disguised as compassionate concern.
- E. Enabling is sinful, accomplice to the sin, one-side relationship and doomed to fail.
- F. **Luke 15:16** *And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.*
- G. Trusting God even with their loved one's life.
  - 1. Any counsel to an enabler must be gentle and truthful since the addict's deception and the self-deception of the enabler are huge issues.
  - 2. Deception is most often motivated by fear.
    - a. Failure while he was Abram and Abraham. (Same sin struggles before and after his calling from God)
    - b. Fear, or love and trust in God? **1 John 4:18** *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.*
    - c. Enablers need to heed and memorize this verse. God's Word applied to their own hearts. **1 Cor.11:31** *But if we judge ourselves truly, we would not be judged.*

#### IV. The Enabler's Inventory<sup>2</sup> (Inventory is attached to the end of these notes)

- A. Encourage you to do this inventory yourself first. (You the counselor.) Think of who you might be enabling or helping in an inordinate way.
- B. Use this inventory to help confront and correct an enabler.
  - 1. You could send it home with them or you could do it with them in person to help encourage more honesty.
  - 2. You could also ask them to have someone else complete it from their perspective.
- C. Quote from instructions:  
*\*It may even be helpful for you to have someone else complete this inventory for you as well to give you insight into your "blind spots." Some people have given an inventory like this one to their addicted love one and had eye-opening results.*

#### V. How Enablers Contribute to an Addict's Sin: Biblical Examples

- A. **Genesis 27** – Rebekah is a type of enabler helping Jacob to steal from Esau the blessing of Isaac:
  - 1. She is like a **busybody**, inserting herself by planning the scheme for him to execute in **v. 9-10** *Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves. <sup>10</sup> And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.*

---

<sup>2</sup> The inventory has been adapted from and excerpted from Appendix A of Dr. Mark E. Shaw's book *Divine Intervention: Hope and Help for Families of Addicts*, Focus Publishing: Bemidji, ©2007, 2011.

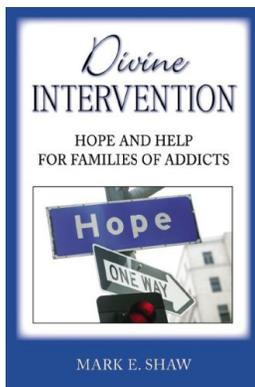


- a. Enablers might have good intentions for the person they are enabling.
  - b. Enablers are often blinded by their desires to “help.”
2. She participates in the deceptive plan in **v. 15-17** *Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. <sup>16</sup>And the skins of the young goats she put on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. <sup>17</sup>And she put the delicious food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.*
  - a. Enablers spend lots of effort in “helping” their loved one accomplish their sinful actions.
  - b. Enablers spend lots of resources in “helping” their loved one accomplish their sinful actions. Rebekah put the food into the “hand of her son.”
3. Focusing on the addict: Jacob lies; uses God as the reason in **v. 20** *But Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” He answered, “Because the LORD your God granted me success.”*
4. Esau hates Jacob as a result in **v. 41** *Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”*
  - a. Sin always brings division. We need confession and repentance and forgiveness from God and others. Jacob and Rebekah both need confession and repentance.
  - b. Enabling one sibling in favor of another is common. Biblical counselors should probe for that dynamic by asking good questions.
5. Rebekah feels she must now rescue Jacob from Esau’s anger in **v. 42-44** *But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him, “Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you. <sup>43</sup>Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran <sup>44</sup>and stay with him a while, until your brother’s fury turns away—*
  - a. Now, this enabling has gone wrong and hasn’t “worked!” The enabler feels she must increase effort to try to fix the situation with more enabling behavior.
  - b. The enabler may feel more and more guilty, and more and more fearful as things go wrong...  
...contributing to more enabling behavior to try and fix it.
6. Rebekah experiences the consequences of her enabling in verse 46 *Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?”*



- a. Her enabling behaviors have not produced the desired outcome. (the result was her son fleeing the land)
- b. Unintended consequences occur, creating an opportunity for repentance. The consequences are intended to produce an opportunity for repentance.
  - i. Will she see and repent? That would be a good consequence.
  - ii. Unfortunately, Rebekah's identity is tied to her son Jacob. Her reputation is at stake and she fears it and loathes it. (Hittite women as wife for her son)
  - iii. Some consequences are not changeable... they last a lifetime. (Isaac's blessing of Jacob cannot be changed, prison sentence, injury, accidental death of others because of DUI)
  - iv. Repentance is always possible as long as they live

B. The younger son in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 seeks an enabler but finds none.



Available at Focus Publishing

## VI. Some Good Counseling Questions to Ask a Potential Enabler

- A. Some enabling behaviors (in and of themselves) are not good or bad. It is the **heart that must be discerned** and most often by someone on the outside (TCF or counselor).
- B. Counselors can ask:
  - 1. Has God assigned you (the enabler) this task?
  - 2. What is your role in this person's life? (uncle, parent, friend, spouse, child, etc.) NOTE: Then clarify that role for them biblically.
  - 3. What makes you think you have the right to be involved in this situation?
  - 4. What is your heart motivation – to be a support person or to be a rescuer? Do you want to feel needed?
  - 5. Is your motive God's glory? (Or for self-importance or self-glory) **1 Cor. 10:31**



6. Is your motive love for God and others? **1 Cor. 16:14** *Let all that you do be done in love.*
7. What was the result the previous time you inserted yourself into the situation? **Prov. 26:11** *Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.*
8. Is your opinion being sought by those involved or not?
9. Is your help rooted in biblical principles or your own opinion? **Prov. 16:25** *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*
10. Do you become sinfully angry when your advice is not heeded?
11. Are you helping someone who will squander your assistance? **Matthew 7:6** *Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.*

## VII. Helping an Enabler to Think Before They Act

Your counsel of family members will be focused on the following:

- A. Future reaping of the harvest they sow right now
- B. Emphasize that we are not saying that they cannot ever help their addicted loved one.
- C. Instruct them in wisdom to take a look at their own heart first.

**Matthew 7:3-5** *Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*

**Galatians 6:1-5** *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup> For each will have to bear his own load.*

- D. Prepare the family members for wide range of emotional reactions from their addicted loved one.
  1. When the family members begin holding the addict accountable rather than enabling sinful behavior, they will see anger, hurt, resentment, frustration, rage, and bitterness manifest in the addict's demeanor, words, actions, and attitudes toward them.
  2. Warn them!
  3. The idolatrous addict views persons as objects to be manipulated rather than living souls. When you cease enabling you become an obstacle.



- 
- E. Counsel the family member who is repenting of enabling to expect and plan for an overly dramatic, emotional response that is to be confronted when it happens. It is an attempt to manipulate/deceive the family member.
  - F. Encourage the enabler who repents of their enabling to keep their heart in the right motive of trusting God.

### **VIII. Summary**

- A. You will have many more opportunities to counsel family members and enablers.
- B. You have been provided with:
  - 1. What enabling is and some of the heart issues behind it
  - 2. Enabler's Inventory for Families
  - 3. Practical questions (2 sets) that probe the heart to use in counseling
  - 4. Scriptural examples and principles to help you confront and correct those who are enabling as you lovingly counsel them.



### ENABLER'S INVENTORY<sup>3</sup>

By Mark E. Shaw, D.Min.

*The goal of this inventory is to lead you to true repentance. What the world calls "enabling" the one struggling with sins of an addictive nature in your life, the Bible calls meddling, or being a busybody. As you complete this form, ask yourself, "What thoughts and actions of mine are enabling my addicted loved one to continue in sin?" and may the Lord grant you insight into how you can change for the glory of God.*

Circle from 1 to 5 on the following scale.

**Strongly Disagree ← 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 → Strongly Agree**

1. If I have said 'no' about something, and then you ask me multiple times, I eventually give in to you and give you what you want, even when I know it is wrong.  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5
2. I give you multiple warnings, without following through with consequences.  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5
3. I have tried to make up for the poor treatment you got as a small child by giving you pleasurable things.  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5
4. Sometimes, concern for my reputation or what people might think of me is more in the forefront of my mind than concern for your heart before God.  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5
5. I have given you no clearly defined expectations in our relationship.  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5
6. I have worried about what might happen if I didn't help you get out of your troubles. I have not allowed you to feel the pain of God's discipline or any authority's discipline of you.  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5
7. I worry about how I might feel guilty if you were to die from your addiction.  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5
8. I have made excuses for your failure to achieve high standards of behavior or for your commission of immoral acts (i.e. I have had thoughts like, "The reason your grades were poor was because you had to work to support yourself through school," or, "The reason you talked harshly to me or your teachers was because you were so tired and your Dad was mean to you last night.")  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5
9. I have ignored your disrespect of authority, or joined in your dishonoring and disrespect of your God-given authority figures (i.e. father, mother, teacher, or employer).

<sup>3</sup> I encourage you to read all of Appendix A (pp91-94 in the book) which has much more than just what is found in this portion of the inventory. This inventory was created from and adapted from portions of Appendix A in the book *Divine Intervention: Hope and Help for Families of Addicts*, by Mark E. Shaw. ©2007, 2011. Focus Publishing, Bemidji, MN offers bulk discounts for orders greater than 10 at the time of this writing. 800-913-6287 (1-800-91-FOCUS) or go to [www.focuspublishing.com](http://www.focuspublishing.com)



1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
 10. Fear of you calling me a hypocrite has hindered me from having conversations with you that might help us focus on your heart toward God (i.e. "If I say that about his drinking then he will point out my sin").

1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
 11. I have failed to rebuke you for fear that you would hate me and never again be a part of my life.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
 12. I am afraid of what my life would be like without you in it.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

13. I compare you to others and then comfort myself with thoughts that you are not as bad as other people I know about.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

14. I have been a peace lover and not a peacemaker. I have avoided conflict rather than trying to resolve it biblically.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

15. I have purposely avoided asking you uncomfortable questions like where you are and what you are doing. It's easier not knowing.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

**YOUR SCORE:** \_\_\_\_\_ (15-75)

**SCALE:**

SCORE	RESULT
75-65	<i>Habitual Enabler</i>
64-52	<i>Frequent Enabler</i>
51-40	<i>Sporadic Enabler</i>
39-27	<i>Careful Enabler</i>
26-15	<i>Biblically Aware Enabler</i>

*\*After completing the inventory, it may be helpful for you to have someone else complete this inventory for you again. This could give you insight into your "blind spots." Some people have given an inventory like this one to their addicted love one and had eye-opening results. Others have completed them with a biblical counselor or Trusted Christian Friend.*